

SITE PARK, PIONEER VILLAGE  
& ANTEBELLUM CEMETERY

"West Point of the South"

1830-1863

# LAGRANGE COLLEGE & MILITARY ACADEMY



LaGrange College Site Park is located 8 miles southeast of Muscle Shoals and 4 miles south of Leighton, Alabama, off HWY 157 (65 miles southeast of Shiloh National Military Park).



Park open daily. Welcome Center open Sun. 1-4 pm  
Admission to the Park is free.  
256-446-9324 • 256-702-6953 • 256-702-9799

For lodging and tourist info:  
Colbert County Tourism & Convention Bureau  
800-344-0783 • 256-383-0783  
colbertcountytourism.org

The continuing restoration and preservation of LaGrange College Site Park is accomplished through tax deductible memberships and donations. For more information contact:

1491 LaGrange College Road • P.O. Box 306 • Leighton, AL 35646  
256-466-9324 • louiselenz9324@gmail.com

[facebook.com/LaGrange.Collegesite.Park](https://www.facebook.com/LaGrange.Collegesite.Park)

[www.lagrangehistoricsite.com](http://www.lagrangehistoricsite.com)

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LEIGHTON, AL



Photo by Mary Carton

[www.lagrangehistoricsite.com](http://www.lagrangehistoricsite.com)

## LaGrange College 1830 - 1855

In the early 1820's, LaGrange was established on the crest of a mountain near Leighton, AL with about 400 inhabitants. In the late 1820s, the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church solicited proposals for a site and subscription of \$10,000. On December 4, 1828, the Methodist Church accepted the LaGrange proposition. Later that month, the Mississippi Conference joined in the efforts to establish a college. Representatives from the two conferences met at LaGrange on January 10, 1829, and selected a site for the college. On January 11, 1830, "LaGrange College" opened with an enrollment of 70 students and became the first state chartered college in Alabama. Rev. Robert Paine was the first president (1830-1846).



The enrollment peaked at 139 in 1845. Dr. Richard H. Rivers became president in 1854, when the college faced serious financial problems. In response to an offer of better support, Rivers moved the college to Florence, Alabama in January 1855. Over 150 graduates received A.B. degrees during its 25-year history. The establishment of LaGrange College in 1830 might well be considered the birth of collegiate education in Alabama. The move was controversial, some students and faculty remained on the old campus, and the Florence institution was denied permission to use the name of LaGrange College.

It was chartered as Florence Wesleyan University on February 14, 1856, and is known today as the University of North Alabama. Listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage in 1976.

## LaGRANGE MILITARY ACADEMY 1857-1862

After LaGrange College moved to Florence in January 1855, a group of LaGrange citizens organized a college in the vacant buildings under the old name. Rev. Felix Johnson was elected president. To increase the patronage, a military feature was introduced in 1857. Major J.W. Robertson became superintendent and classes were suspended while a third major building was erected for the cadets. The college reopened in February 1858, as LaGrange College and Military Academy. The new institution's financial situation was dismal until the State of Alabama provided military equipment and scholarships. The Academy soon flourished and became known as the "West Point of the South." In 1860, the name was changed to LaGrange Military Academy. By 1861, the enrollment was almost 200 cadets. During its existence, 259 cadets from nine states attended the Academy.



cadets had graduated. Major Robertson was authorized to organize the 35th Alabama Infantry Regiment, C.S.A. He was elected colonel and the remaining cadets formed part of one company. The regiment was mustered into the Confederate Army on March 12, 1862, for three years. On April 28, 1863, the 10th Missouri Calvary of the Union Army, known as the "Destroying Angels," commanded by Col. Florence M. Comyn, burned the Military Academy, the nearby La Fayette Female Academy, many businesses, and homes. The village of LaGrange dwindled away. In 1995, LaGrange Park was transferred from the Alabama Historical Commission to the LaGrange Living Historical Association. Thereafter, the site of Alabama's first chartered college was enhanced and stands today as a historical landmark.

Listed on Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage in 1976.

*LaGrange College was the forerunner of the University of North Alabama (UNA) located in nearby Florence, Ala.*

In 1861, many LaGrange cadets left to join the Confederate Army. Consequently, the Academy was forced to suspend classes on March 1, 1862. Only two

## LaGrange College Site Park LaGrange Welcome Center



LaGrange College Site was listed on **The Alabama Register of Landmarks & Heritage** in 1976. Ownership of the property was transferred from the Alabama

Historical Commission to the **LaGrange Living Historical Association** in 1995. A log, dog-trot house was purchased and moved to the site around the same time to be used as a Welcome Center, Museum and meeting place for the Association members. **The park is open year round. The Welcome Center is open on Sundays 1-4 p.m., or by appointment: 256-446-9324.**

The pioneer Village also includes a **Picnic Pavilion, a Memorial Monument, several Historic Markers, Log Barn, Smoke House, Bed & Breakfast Inn, Wedding Chapel, Barber Shop, Out House, Slave Log Kitchen, Post Office, Country Store, Black Smith Shop and a Caretaker's House.**

## LaGrange Rock Shelter National Register of Historic Places

The Rock Shelter is located within walking distance of the LaGrange College Site Park. It was added to the National Register in 1974, after an Archaeological Excavation was performed in 1972. Test revealed that the site was once home to the Paleo Indians and said to be one of the oldest

"Early Man" archaeological sites in North Alabama. After the excavation, it was determined that the Rock Shelter was significant to the pre-history of the entire North American continent.

## OBSERVATORY READIED FOR STARGAZING

Volunteers from Shoals Astronomy Club are working to restore an observatory built by local astronomers in the 1960s. The Muscle Shoals Astronomical Society built the observatory and its roll-off roof, which helps delicate telescopes keep the same temperature. During Recall LaGrange, amateur astronomers will set up solar telescopes for free (and safe) public viewing, along with other stargazing events through the year. For questions about the observatory and schedule, contact Eric Geater at 731-431-3742, or visit shoalsastro.com for their club calendar.



## LaGrange Cemetery and Rick's Monument

The Antebellum-Civil War Cemetery is listed on the Register of Landmarks & Heritage and is within walking distance of the LaGrange College Site. First Impression Cemetery Dramas are portrayed by Re-Enactors during Recall LaGrange, of 19th century residents who once lived at LaGrange. Of particular interest is: **the Petrified Lady**, Annie Vinson Ford, who was discovered petrified after being removed from her burial plot to another plot in the cemetery. The final resting place of Abraham Ricks is marked by a monument crafted by an Italian sculptor. The towering monument cost \$5,000 in 1852. **Contributions for cemetery up keep are tax deductible.**



## Plantation Log Kitchen

The Oaks Plantation log kitchen was once identified as one of the last log kitchens in existence in the State of Alabama. The Plantation and log kitchen were both placed on the **National Register of Historic Places** in 1976. Built

in the early 1800's, the servants of Abraham Ricks prepared the families meals inside the kitchen and transported the food to the dining room of the main house. In order to save the log kitchen from destruction, in 2009 the building was dismantled, numbered and transported to the College Site. After the reconstruction, a number of original pieces of furniture were placed back inside the kitchen. **Today, the log kitchen is one of the main attractions of the park where, occasionally, cooking demonstrations are held.**

## Student Field Trips & Group Tours

Educational Field Trips and Group Tours of the park and cemetery provide an in-depth look into the history of Alabama's 1st Chartered College and Historic Cemetery. Volunteer guides dressed in period clothing will help you experience daily life at the College and Military Academy. **Reservations: 256-446-9324.**



## LaGrange Bed & Breakfast Reservations from April thru November

The 1880, two bedroom log cabin, B&B Inn, is located on the crest of LaGrange Mountain, inside the pioneer village of the LaGrange College Site Park. It is discreetly modernized with electricity and air conditioning for comfort. The sleeping quarters will accommodate five people. **Contact: 256-446-9324**

## LaGrange Country Store Post Office & Blacksmith Shop

Upon entering the log **Country Store**, experience life from years past; while viewing and purchasing goods from olden days. The **Post Office** is equipped with furnishings from an old post office.

Adjoining the Country Store is; a **Blacksmith Shop**. A black smith demonstrates the art of black smith work during school and annual events. **Contact: 256-446-5358 for appointments.**



## Christmas in the Country



Photo by: TimesDaily Newspaper: Courtney Adcock

LaGrange Christmas in the Country is held each year on the weekend before Thanksgiving. Natural, handmade ornaments and fresh greenery adorn the entire log buildings located inside the historic park.

Folks arrive early to purchase homemade baked goods for their Thanksgiving table, enjoy hay rides, purchase craft items, and experience a walk back into time while touring the log buildings. Santa and Mrs. Claus will be on hand to pose for pictures. **Admission to the Event is Free.**

## Recall LaGrange



Since 1988, the LaGrange Living Historical Association has sponsored an annual event; "Recall LaGrange" at the LaGrange College Site Park. The event portrayed the 1863 demise of the LaGrange-Military Academy during the Civil War.

Today, a Timeline of historical events are featured with emphases on numerous wars; demonstrations, arts & crafts, food vendors, educational lecturers, school field trips, music and more.

Co-Sponsors include the 27th Alabama Inf. Reg. Re-actors and the Providence Living History Re-Enactors. **THE EVENT IS FREE.**

## Mountain Weddings Overlooking the Tennessee Valley

A natural setting nestled inside a Historic Park.

**Amenities Include:**

- Log Chapel or Outdoor Setting
- Ceremony by Ordained Minister
- One night lodging in B & B Inn
- Reception
- Tables, Chairs & Ferns
- Photography/flowers (available)
- Music

Visit our Web site:

[www.lagrangehistoricsite.com](http://www.lagrangehistoricsite.com)

Email: [louiselenz9324@gmail.com](mailto:louiselenz9324@gmail.com)

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